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Conservatives to skip Vote Smart debates



By Brock Weir

Local Conservative candidates have declined to participate in a series of all-candidates meetings set for Aurora on September 16 and 17.

Aurora university student Kelsea Walsh founded the Vote Smart campaign this past May, intending to create a new twist on giving local candidates a platform to explain why they are running to represent area constituents in the October 19 Federal Election, speak about the issues that matter to them, and engage with voters in an informal setting.

It is largely intended to appeal to voters on the younger end of the demographic scale, but Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill candidate Costas Menegakis told The Auroran that a debate like this ?just doesn't fit into our campaign plan? ? and his fellow Conservative candidate in Newmarket-Aurora, Lois Brown, would not be participating either.

Instead, Mr. Menegakis said he would be focusing on participating in just two debates this election, the first, an all-candidates meeting slated for Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School on the evening of Thursday, September 24, and the upcoming debate September 16 televised on Rogers TV.

?I will not be participating in the Vote Smart debates and my understanding is neither will Lois,? said Mr. Menegakis, following a final push by Ms. Walsh to build awareness for the Vote Smart meetings at the Aurora Cultural Centre on Friday morning. ?It is a campaign decision we took early on when Vote Smart came up. [We did] two debates in the last election that have a wider audience, and the Rogers debates. Any local debates, small things here and there, just doesn't fit into our campaign plan.?

Nevertheless, planning for the Vote Smart debates continue.

Newmarket-Aurora candidates Yvonne Kelly (NDP), Vanessa Long (Green), and Kyle Peterson (Liberal), along with Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill candidates Leona Alleslev (Liberal) and Brenda Power (NDP) joined Ms. Walsh at the Cultural Centre on Friday morning to raise awareness of the event.
The remaining Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill candidates will take the stage on Wednesday, September 16, from 6.30 ? 9 p.m. at the Cultural Centre, with the Newmarket-Aurora candidates participating in their meeting at the same time and the same place the following evening.

?We have everything planned now and all the candidates have said they are going to come, but I am still waiting for Lois Brown and Costas Menegakis,? said Ms. Walsh following the event. ?I am still hoping they will be able to make it out. Everyone has a very

busy schedule, so it is a matter of getting a response and with some of the people I have been working with. It is quite difficult to get a response or find the time in their schedules to come to Vote Smart-related events.

?I think it would be a real shame if one of the parties were absent. I created Vote Smart not because I have any political agenda. I don't care what the turnout of the night is or what the outcome is for the night. I really just want people to come and be informed, vote and feel they got something useful out of Vote Smart. [This event] can only be as useful as it could be if all the parties are present. It can only do its full job if all the parties are present.?

By Friday afternoon, however, it was clear Vote Smart would not be firing on all cylinders by the time the Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill candidates take the stage.

?We're scheduled every single day back to October 19 and we made sure we made room for the two big debates so we have an opportunity to answer questions and do all that wonderful stuff we're supposed to do to get our message out and converse with constituents through the Chambers, Rogers and the media that will be there as well,? said Mr. Menegakis.

Ms. Brown was not available for comment on her decision not to participate in Vote Smart and comment requested from Ms. Brown's campaign, Peter Seemann, on their rationale had not been received at press time.

Newmarket-Aurora politicians have been invited to participate in their first all-candidates meeting ? this one a forum focusing on social issues ? this Thursday, September 10, from 7.30 ? 9.30 p.m. at Newmarket's Trinity United Church. All are welcome to attend -- and all candidates have confirmed their attendance, according to event organizers.